

INTERVIEWEE: PAUL & KAY KERSTEN

INTERVIEWER: Patricia Young

SUBJECT:

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TRANSCRIBER: Linda A. Jantzen

PY: Interview with Paul and Kay Kersten for the Historical Society of Palm Desert Oral History Project on July 2, 1980, at eleven thirty in the morning at their home on Way in Indio.

All right, I think if we can begin this morning by just talking about how you happened to come to the Rancho Mirage area. Your father's interest, I think, wasn't it?

PK: Okay. Well, in 1942 my father acquired two hundred acres on what would now be described as the northwest corner of Bob Hope Drive and Country Club Drive. At that time Country Club Drive was nonexistent. Bob Hope Drive was a street called Rio Del Sol and it was a dirt road that started from Highway 111 and terminated at

the aforesaid intersection. And the land was barren. It was raw desert land. My dad had a program of developing it into a date orchard and vineyard. Due to the fact that it was in the early days of the war, farm machinery was practically unavailable, and through a friendship in Los Angeles, I was able to secure an old track layer, caterpillar type tractor. And when we put it on the job we found that it was in need of parts so we acquired two other machines with the same vintage in order to use it to rob parts to keep one machine in the field. And my dad and I did the actual transit work in preparing the land for leveling, did our own engineering and fought that old tractor for months out there leveling that land. One of the interesting things about leveling the land was the population of sidewinders in the area. When we disturbed them out of the brush, they found that they had to travel at night to seek other shelter. But oftentimes they didn't quite make it. We'd leveled off a large enough area where they were caught by the sun in the early morning and they'd perish. We had a snake man that visited the premises and one day he captured on the order of two hundred of these sidewinders and toted them away in a bag. It wasn't unusual to take

a drive at night and encounter several of them along the dirt road.

PY: What was the snake man?

PK: Well, he was evidently collecting them for the venom so that they could use that in hospitals for this anti-snake serum, so he took them alive. To the best of our knowledge they were going for that purpose. It was very, very common to find sidewinders most any evening when taking a drive at that time. In fact, even driving up and down the highway you'd almost invariably encounter several of them each evening. Of course, we very seldom see them now. So the program then was to, at that time, was not fully developed. We grew alfalfa and my dad got the great idea of raising hogs. We acquired two hundred head of hogs and raised as much grain and alfalfa as we could on the premises for their needs and supplemented the feed by purchasing grain from the Stewart sisters up in Beaumont, hauling the grain down to the ranch and then preparing the meal with a hammer mill and feeding it out to the hogs. Now that wasn't a very successful venture, but during the transition we proceeded to plant Thompson seedless grapes and we acquired date offshoots from a fellow named

Bert Cavanagh who is still well known in the valley, being an early date grower. About that time, I entered the Armed Services. As a matter of fact, I entered the Armed Services in April of 1944 and I was shipped overseas and returned to the farm in May of 1946. About that time, we were starting some production of fruit from the vineyard. The date trees were progressing very well and we continued to upgrade the ranch. It was very common to have the wash, our only way of getting into the ranch, wash out during heavy rainfalls in the mountains. And it was our responsibility to reopen the road where the so-called bridge is now, the Bob Hope Bridge. At that time it was still called Rio Del Sol Road and I'd take the track layer, and go in and spend a day or two preparing the road bed through the wash so we could get to the grocery store. After the war ended, the facilities at Torney Hospital, which is a military installation occupying the former El Mirador premises in Palm Springs. The hospital was abandoned following the war and some of the old buildings were acquired by us and moved to the ranch. The large packing shed was part of the Torney Hospital facilities. Included therein was a large refrigeration unit which provided us with the

opportunity of having a refrigerated packing facility for our grapes. And this was the first air-conditioned packing shed in the Coachella Valley. Our living quarters at that time from the beginning until around 1946 was an old corrugated iron building that was formerly the first airport hangar in Palm Springs. And refrigeration was not available to us; we had a desert cooler we improvised from spare parts and that was our means of keeping it relatively comfortable during the hot summer months. We had somewhat of a subsistence farm in the beginning. We had a dozen chickens and a milk cow and we had a couple of riding horses. It was really a rural setting at that time.

PY: How old were you at this point?

PK: Well, I was twenty-two when we started all this. So formerly I'd worked in my dad's factory in Los Angeles and also with the Volte Aircraft Corporation as a tool and dye maker.

PY: I understand that Kay's father had built the home.

PK: That's right. That's how I became acquainted. Kay's father was a builder and when my dad progressed to the point where he was ready to build a home, he engaged John C. Croft, my father-in-law, to do the building.

PY: So it was just that the initial building was corrugated?

PK: It -as that corrugated sheet metal that was really pretty rough place. (laughter) It served as a combination shop and living quarters.

KK: Well, during that period they had their home in Los Angeles still so that . . .

PK: We didn't commit very much, though.

KK: (chuckle) And his mother wasn't overjoyed about coming out to the desert and staying in this makeshift place and being isolated from the stores, but she's a good sport. She did it for a good many years, but then when they built the house and it was very nice and comfortable.

PK: Well, the property was sold in 1961 to the Shuman Brothers of the Riviera Hotel in Palm Springs. And my father reserved a couple of acres in the home site and retained that until his death in 1974.

PY: Is that still the same?

PK: The house has since been razed and it has become part of the parcel that is now known as the Springs.

PY: How many acres did he have initially?

PK: Two hundred acres initially. And then we annexed an additional forty acres to the south during the development of the ranch. That, too, was sold to the Shumans

at the same time.

PY: So did you at one point have property on the other side of Country Club?

PK: Yes. I had the vineyard on the corner, it would be the southwest corner of Country Club Drive and Bob Hope Drive. That was a vineyard of grapes. The largest portion of the acreage was in vineyard. But the dates that were grown there were some of the finest-quality dates grown in the Coachella Valley. For some reason, that part of the valley produces more natural, good-quality fruit than the lower valley. But due to the change in land values, it became impractical to grow vegetables or fruit in that area, higher value for other purposes.

PY: I understand . . . What kind of grapes did you have?

PK: Well, they were Thompson seedless grapes at that time, and they were the earliest table grape. Since then there's been introduced a variety which comes off earlier. And perhaps two or three weeks earlier than we were producing them.

PY: Did your Thompson seedless come in later however than
?

PK: Yes, we were not the earliest grapes in the valley. The Thermal area produced the earliest ones. We followed

them by a matter of two weeks or so. I can recall one year we were as late as July the fourth in completing our harvest.

PY: Was that a hindrance to the business?

PK: Oh, yes. We were plagued sometimes with early rains, and it would really cause a hazard if the fruit would become mildewed. And we were caught one year with the rain toward the latter part of the season and suffered quite a loss in the fruit. But in most years we were able to operate it at a success rate, and the enterprise itself. Until the land values became too high to make farming feasible, it was a profitable enterprise.

PY: When did that actually take place?

PK: The sale?

PY: The land values being too high. When did that start?

PK: Oh, probably around 1958 more or less the land values started to rise before it became evident that they had higher and better use than farming.

PY: By that time were you living out there full time?

PK: Oh, yes. My father, it was his full-time residence during all that period. And, of course, meanwhile, when I returned from the service, I stayed on the ranch a short time. And in 1950 I went up to college, went up

to UCLA, and then from there up to Berkeley. And received my Bachelor of Science degree in economics in 1952. And then I returned to the valley, and shortly thereafter I went into the farming business in the lower valley, principally as a vegetable grower, growing mostly carrots and green onions and corn, the general crop pattern. I continued that business on until 1967.

PY: Well, I have lots of questions if you can't think of anything more. I had understood that the packing shed was the largest in the cove area.

PK: Yes, that would be true. Yes, this is a very large building, and it was very modern due to the fact that it was insulated and refrigerated so that the people working in the packing line had the benefit of refrigeration, as well as the produce going into still a colder room for temporary storage prior to shipment.

PY: What did you do with the dates after you packed them? Did you have your own . . .

PK: Our grapes were shipped through a co-op, known as the Blue Anchor brand, and the California Fruit Exchange was the name of the co-op. The dates were packed on the premises and sold. We actually functioned as a dealer

in the dates and sold to various jobbers and retail chains throughout the country.

PY: Did you have any mail order business?

PK: At one time we did. As a matter of fact, the Desert Magazine was newly started around the time our date harvest was, production was coming up to worthwhile standing. And my dad negotiated with the Desert Magazine to get the mailing list of all their subscribers. So his first year with the response from those advertisements were enormous. Following that, other date growers in the area decided it wasn't such a bad idea to do the same thing, so we had plenty of competition. None the less, it was a successful enterprise and very profitable until the postal rates became so high. And when the postal rates reached the point where it was so costly to have dates shipped by mail that the people could buy dates cheaper in the stores in the east coast than we could provide them with by mail order. And the business, due to that postal rate increase, became null and void.

PY: What kind of dates were you

PK: These were all Daglet-Noors. They're the standard variety in the valley. They're a semi-hard date. They're very durable. And if properly stored, they'd last for years.

Of course, there are many other varieties that are known now, but at that time it was the standard date and still is represented by the greatest number of acres in the valley, Daglet-Noors.

PY: Was there any change over the years in terms of the kinds of people who were working for you?

PK: Oh, well, during the early days we did a lot of our own work and eventually hired men to drive the tractors and the other chores. During the period we were developing the ranch, they were domestic farm hands. And subsequently, when the need for labor increased due to harvesting and preparation of the crops, we used wetbacks from Mexico. It was very common in those days to hire the men. That was before the bracero program was instituted by the government as a manpower emergency act.

In those days the government policy was to, whenever the wetbacks were discovered, to pick them up and return them to Mexico. There wasn't any penalty for the growers who had hired them. The only people who were prosecuted were those that brought the men over. We were responsible for transporting them. And kind of an interesting thing during those days when the men were picked up, the Border

Patrolmen brought the men to the office and they were paid off in full and were returned to Mexico. It wasn't unusual for some of the same individuals to show up at the farm three or four days later. They knew pretty well where they'd been and found their way back. And they were excellent workers. They were highly motivated workers. And labor was really not a problem at that time. Subsequently, labor did become a problem in the Coachella Valley. The bracero program was phased out, and the local workers, although a certain number of them were adequate and motivated to work, unfortunately, there was always a shortage of well-qualified workers. And many times the crops suffered during the harvest period because of the labor shortage.

PY: When you said domestic work hands, were they also Mexicans who . . .

PK: No, these were a mixed group. They were migrant workers. They were Anglos, some Mexican-Americans. But the tractor drivers, men that were more or less the full-time employees, were usually from the midwest and had migrated out here to take permanent jobs in farming. The harvest hands, from the onset, were usually Mexican-Americans, speaking of the domestic ones. A lot of them migrated up from the

state of Texas and worked seasonally here when work was available. And then shifted along with the crop pattern out to other areas in the states.

PY: Okay. I don't know that we mentioned it, but I wanted to talk a little bit about the wells that were on that . . . (chuckle) You can't get your pipe lit for anything, can you?

PK: Yes. Well, the first well was drilled by a well driller from the Hemet area. And in those days they used what is called a bucket rig. They had it, what would be an effect, a hollow pipe supported by a cable and they dropped the pipe down into the well and the pipe would fill with earth, and they'd haul it out with a cable and wash the dirt out and send it down for another fill. It was a very laborious task to drill a well with that old method. Our well was, the first well was, four hundred feet deep, and our water table, the water rose in the well up to fifty-five feet of the earth's surface. So we had good-quality water and not very high lift with our pump. Subsequently we built, drilled several sells, at some of the deeper depths. And as the years went by the water table dropped due to development in the area and large usage of the water. And the pumping costs rose consider-

ably due to that. Of course, we were in an area where canal service wasn't available. It never has developed up to that point. So we were fully dependent on indigenous water from the Whitewater water shed.

PY: Did the district supply water?

PK: No. The Coachella Valley County Water District, as a matter of fact, when we first developed the ranch, the canal hadn't been installed yet. Subsequently the Coachella Valley County Water District has, in addition to delivering irrigation water to the lower valley, has gone into the development of domestic water for residential and commercial development. A large number of the wells in the area now are controlled and operated by the Coachella Valley County Water District.

PY: Do you know whether the Shumans were able to use the wells when they developed the Springs or if they went to domestic water?

PK: I'm not certain what they've done there, but I surmise that the best of the wells probably were taken. The operation was taken over by the water district. They have a certain standard that they require, quality standard in wells, and they have been able to make use of some of the wells we had that met the standard.

Those that didn't meet the standard were capped off and abandoned. I would have surmised that it's water district now providing that service.

PY: Another thing I wanted to ask you about, when you were talking about leveling, did you more or less level that first two hundred acres all at once?

PK: No, we did it in increments as we, with our miserable old tractor. And, as I said, we had three of them in order to keep one in the field. And we were still in the process of doing some of the leveling when I returned from the military. At that time I was able to get a priority unit in acquiring surplus military equipment. And I proceeded to go to the sales at the various depots around California and succeeded in acquiring a couple more modern tractors. Also, I lucked out in one of the sales in finding a box-making machine that had never been taken out of the packing crate. And we assembled it and made use of it in providing our own shipping containers with that.

PY: For the packing, did you actually take dates in or grapes from, or I should say dates, mainly from other ranches in the area?

PK: Well, to some extent our, probably the majority of those

packed in the facilities were our own. Although Mr. Hank Gogerty, our close neighbor, used the facility for his vineyard. And Hank Gogerty and my dad were very close friends, and they worked back and forth to solve various problems. When Mr. Gogerty's well failed, my dad ran a line over to Hank's property and provided him with water during the time it was necessary to drill a new well. And they worked back and forth in many ways, cooperating.

PY: I understand from Hank Gogerty that at one point when he was getting the cottages for Desert Air~~h~~, that, what was the name of the rubber

✓ PK: president.

✓ PY: right. That your father also purchased some of those

PK: Yes, he sure did. My dad was funny about the figure thirteen. He wasn't at all superstitious; he was born on the 13th of November, and just everything was thirteen, and it was fine enough with him. So he acquired thirteen
✓ of these buildings. And he had a property on the intersection of the ~~Velt~~ and Rio Del Sol as it was called in those days, now Bob Hope Drive. And there again, Mr. Croft and I worked on that. We put the concrete

slabs down, and put four by four redwood mud sills on the side. And we laid these buildings on that, and that was about vacation time. So we terminated our activities and along came one of those famous summer windstorms and the thirteen buildings disintegrated out into the desert. And my dad says, "Didn't you insure those buildings, Kid?" He called me kid, and I said, "Sure, don't you remember; I took care of that." And it was Mr. Gogerty's brother, in Los Angeles, who insured those. At least we were able to recup on that. But misfortune followed misfortune. There was a church in Indio that wanted, wondered if they could get some of the doors from the buildings that were no longer usable, so my father good-naturedly granted them permission to pick the doors up. And during the process, an old truck they had sent over wouldn't start. So he volunteered to help get the truck started. And he took a can of gasoline and was priming the carburetor. The truck backfired. My dad was engulfed in gasoline flames. And as a result, he lay in a hospital six weeks and one day with severe burns. And to show you how gritty he was, his right arm was just inactivated entirely from all the time it was, you know, during this hospital stay, and he got the use of his hand back by holding a

tennis ball and squeezing it by the hour to renew his ability. And he finally succeeded in getting that hand where he could proceed with the work that he'd been doing. That was in 1946 that he had that happen.

PY: What was the purpose of the buildings? Was he . . .

PK: The buildings were going, well, actually, Hank Gogerty started what was called the Desert Air~~h~~ Hotel where he had a landing strip and a hotel. Those buildings were originally the same old barracks buildings that was the kind my father had across the street. He was, I suppose was going to put up similar structures and make rentals of them. But we never saw that into fruition. (laughter)

PY: Competition never came about. (laughter)

PK: No, it never happened.

PY: (laughter) Oh. Did you later do anything else with that property?

PK: I think my father sold it to one of the Palm Springs School Districts. I think subsequently they sold it to developers. I think it's private residential stuff now.

PY: Was it on the north or south side of . . .

PK: Well, it would be, I would say on the Velt^d and Bob Hope Drive. It lay on the west of Bob Hope Drive between the

storm channel and the velt.

PY: Sounds like it was jinxed property.

PK: Yes, it was a bummer.

PY: For your property.

PK: That was a real bummer. But didn't win him off. When we had the hogs, Coler Seed Store is an old institution in Indio and we were buying barley down there. I think we were paying two dollars a hundredweight. And we thought that was a little bit high, so we negotiated with the Stewart sisters up in Beaumont to follow their combine over hill and dale to pick it up and buy it direct from the farmer. But we negotiated to buy it at the prevailing price. Well, when the harvest took place, grain wasn't two dollars. It was two dollars and twenty cents a hundredweight plus the cost of driving hill and dale over to the Stewart sisters ranch in Beaumont and hauling it down there from in our frail ton and a half truck. I had a Russian friend that I'd gone to high school with, a fellow named David Tekenoff, and he was a very stouthearted man. He and I hauled barley down for weeks. (laughter)

PY: What ever happened to those hogs? They're infamous, by the way.

PK: Well, they were disposed of during the, marketed while I was in the military. I was sort of the chore boy when it came to the hogs. I remember I vaccinated seventy head of them for one day shortly before I left for the service. And I wasn't really to see them gone when I came back. (laughter)

PY: I assume they weren't profitable, and that's why they were there.

PK: They were. We were in a cost price squeeze with the hogs. There was some sort of a, during those days they had a limit on price control of livestock, but not on the barley.

KK: How about the way you hauled down the . . .

PK: Well, that was a cute one. We . . .

KK: That you got out from the track.

PK: Of course, we were breeding the animals. And there again we made one of those infamous trips to Beaumont, and it was a hog raiser up there sold us a magnificent boar, going around four hundred pounds. And Dad and I hauled him down Highway 111 from Beaumont. We were almost to the ranch when the crazy thing got rambunctious and climbed over the rail of the truck, fell on his rump in the highway, and expired immediately. And my dad, being of frugal nature, decided to butcher the carcass. And

I've never tasted such awful meat. A boar hog produces pretty raunchy-tasting meat. (laughter) We spent the whole balance of the day butchering that old boar. And we tasted that meat a few times, and I think it was disposed of.

PY: I'm not sure of this, but Ben Montoya was telling me that there were several places in the cove area where he had been raising vegetables.

PK: Yes, that's correct.

PY: Was one of those places your . . .

PK: No, but I became acquainted with Ben. He was the person that removed the offshoots from Bert Cavanagh's orchard when my dad purchased those trees. And it was a two-man operation. Ben taking a large chisel and removing the offshoots, and he and I heisting them up on the pickup. And my driving over, and then giving a hand while we planted them in the field. That was done just before I went into the service. But Ben was a very stubborn fellow, like the rest of us. He'd like to grow things that he evidently was willing to work very cheap because he grew tomatoes until the tomato industry, early tomatoes, started to come out of Mexico and destroyed the market prospects. And, of course, subsequently, as you know,

Ben became the chief grounds keeper at College of the Desert, which I think was more profitable to him. He, incidentally, has since retired. I haven't seen him in the last year or two. I presume he's still living at Palm Desert.

PY: And doing well.

PK: Yes. Ben's a very marvelous person. One of his sons graduated from the Military Academy at West Point. They're a fine family, just wonderful people.

PY: As a matter of fact, the same son just graduated from Georgetown Law School.

PK: Oh, great! That's good news.

PY: And is doing real well.

PK: Glad to hear it.

PY: How much did you pay for those offshoots? Do you remember?

PK: I can't recall, but it must have been mighty little because I can recall in years recent when they were four dollars apiece. I imagine those were fifty cents or a dollar or something like that. FOB, Cavanagh's Ranch. They couldn't have been much more than that. Now they're probably worth twenty-five dollars apiece or it's on that order. But at that time they were, no one was that excited about them, and they were easily available.

PY: This was what, around 1942?

PK: That was in 1943, I would say, we were doing most of that work.

PY: Do you know why your father chose that property to begin with?

PK: Well, it was an interesting thing. His first interest in the farming community there was a property along what is now called Clancey Lane. And there was a forty-acre parcel that had been leveled and had its well. Had a windbreaker around it, and my dad tried to buy it and I think the price was a little bit high. A fellow named Doc Gurley, who was formerly the owner of Valley Motors, acquired that. And since that time, Doc and my Dad were also good friends, so Dad went back to the real estate broker and shopped around. And this two hundred acres was available at fifty-five dollars an acre. And Dad figured that would probably be about right, so he bought it.

PY: Do you know who he purchased it from?

PK: There was a family named Burns. They were the original homesteaders. I guess fifty-five dollars an acre was an attractive price at that time.

PY: That's not bad.

PK: No, not too shabby.

PY: But next to Hank Gogerty's nine dollars and fifty-three cents an acre, it was probably high.

PK: Yes. Dad figured that was the best he could do, so he suffered the high price.

KK: I guess that was actually about average, though, for the
. . .

PK: Oh, that was probably the going market. It was a little rough; the land had mostly greasewood and little sand dunes on it. We had some pretty rough times getting those leaves to stay on the grapes the first year or two. The ground having been newly leveled, the wind would just pick up the sand and it would just grind the leaves right off the grapes. So we had a dickens of a time getting that ground to hold still. So we got it irrigated and planted some alfalfa, other things to hold the soil together. And, of course, we were on the wrong side of the property. The living quarters were right down on the side where the wind blew all the blow sand, so we had a few restless nights there. (laughter) One humorous thing. My dad had a tractor driver that, a fellow named Ott. And he slept in the other portion of the shed. And it was our practice, it was in the summer months,

to get up at daybreak and start driving the tractors. And I remember one morning Ott came in, the wind was blowing like golly west out there. He said, come on, Paul. It's time to get the tractors. And he got into my dad's liquor supply. I could hear him pouring a drink. And his only purpose was to come in and pour himself a drink. And he says, "Well," he says, "Paul," he says, "The wind's blowing pretty hard. Why don't you just bed down, Paul. Just bed down." (laughter)

PY: So it took about a year before the sand was . . .

PK: Well, at least that. And it was a gradual process over the years to get it tied down. We were pretty much out in the open. As land developed from the windward side, why it made a miraculous change for the better because the development in the northwest of us occurred and we were pretty well sheltered.

PY: Who did develop that, or who owned that, I should say?

PK: Well, there's a lady named Thompson had the property a short distance from the west of us. As a matter of fact, a road was named after her, as one road was named after my father that still exists, Kersten Road. And her road is further west. It's known as Thompson Road. And she was somewhat of a pioneer herself out there. And then

there was a Dr. Dollard and a fellow named Peck produced some orchards and vineyards further to the north of Thompsons. And that was just a short time after the war they developed theirs.

PY: But Mrs. Thompson was in there earlier?

PK: No, she was subsequent to my father. But her land was developed subsequent to that.

PY: And who was on the south side of you, anyone?

PK: To the south of us, no. We were it. (chuckle) Going south it would go all the way up to the wash. There wasn't any development at that time. Of course, since it's been developed. But at that time it was all open land between us and the channel there.

PY: Who did you purchase that extra forty acres from?

PK: I don't recall. I think that went for a big price, like two hundred an acre. Land rallies were in a boom state then.

PY: Was that the fifties?

PK: Oh, that was acquired during the time I was in the service, so it would have been 19, somewhere between 1944 and 1946, in that general period.

PY: You mentioned Doc Gurley earlier. Did you also take care of his grapes?

PK: He did his own culture, but my father did the packing, and helped him with the marketing. He was, you know, just down the road a piece, you might say. But it was not that great a distance. It was basically Gurley and Gogerty and my father's grapes. And then there were some dates over to the north of us that were packed through the shed. But the bulk of the dates were from my dad's own orchards. My dad was pretty ingenious. He took a machine that was developed to wrap cheese and modified it to pack dates in little six and eight-ounce packages for retail stores. He was a mechanical genius, without any doubt. He could take any little piece of machinery and make it work when everyone else had given up on it.

PY: I assume that the ranch paid for itself. Was it a profit making beyond that?

PK: The ranch was a profit-making entity. There were two things that led to it being propitious to make a sale. One was the fact that land values had risen so much at the time of the sale. And the other thing was that the development of the new variety of grapes and the installation of so many early vineyards in the Thermal area competing for the early market, and the prospects

less good on the grapes. And it was a matter of, another thing we were advised to plant the grapes on integrals of twelve feet between rows, ten feet between the plants, and subsequently the vineyard operators learned that they could increase their yield by planting the vineyards about seven feet between rows, between plants in the rows. And, hence, were able to secure more production per acre than we were getting. So it was a matter of obsolescence in the planting technique, obsolescence of the variety, and the oncoming land values that made the sale eminent.

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PY: Oh, I was curious. Did you have any other holdings in the area besides what you've mentioned already?

PK: Well, my father, that was the extent of his activities. Subsequently when I went into the vegetable farming business I purchased an eighty-acre farm near the intersection of Monroe and Avenue 42. And also I acquired a twenty-acre parcel on Van Buren and Avenue 49. And during those days I was farming on the order of four hundred acres of land, a combination of that that I've just described as well as leased farm land.

PY: In terms of the ranch in Rancho Mirage, did you consider when you were in advertising, did you consider yourself part of Rancho Mirage or did you advertise as being, you know, part of Palm Springs? Or Indio, or whatever.
(chuckle)

PK: Actually, I mean, our address was Route 1, Indio. I mean, that's the way our mail was addressed. And I suppose we, in describing our location to our friends from Los Angeles and all, we described it as being near Palm Springs. What do you think of that, Kay? You probably were aware . . .

KK: It's kind of strange because before they had the Rancho Mirage post office, as Paul said, everything was out of Indio, and we found that people in the area were somewhat divided. We having come out from Palm Springs, still felt closely allied with Palm Springs, where there were other people that felt closely with Indio, particularly the people who were doing business. So it was sort of a between type of thing. You might say, well, you lived in Rancho Mirage, but Rancho Mirage was just sort of a wide spot in the road. And as I say people either were allied with Palm Springs or Indio, depending upon whichever area they had been involved with. So I think

that, I don't know how they described it in the advertising, but all of the mail order and everything would go actually to the Indio post office. And as Paul said that they had a line of mailboxes there along Rio Del Sol that, where they received their mail, Route 1, Indio, for a long, long time.

PK: First time that land nearby became valuable and a higher and better use was the development of the Thunderbird Country Club. There were many years, though, from the installation of the Country Club until present before the land values rose to anywhere near the present amounts. But it would have been described as the best development anywhere nearby for a long time. What was that? Wasn't that the Red Roof Ranch at one time, wasn't it?

KK: That's right.

PK: Yes. It was sure, what was her name?

KK: Boyd?

PK: Ruth^{ie} Warburton.

KK: Oh, Ruthie Warburton.

PK: And then Phil Boyd, I think, had that, it was an interesting thing there. They grew strawberries back in the late thirties and early forties over there.

PY: Phil Boyd did, or are you saying Ruth Warburton?

PK: Boyd, Boyd did it. He had the strawberry deal.

PY: Right where the Red Roof Ranch was?

PK: Yes. It was a short-lived venture, but it probably wasn't that profitable. It only continued a year or two, and he discontinued it. But they did grow strawberries there.

PY: I think they were growing them out in Quinta, too.

PK: Yes. Well, they've been tried in the valley by some of the major shippers. Tried them down in the Oasis area. They've come and gone. They don't seem to be the item that does well in the desert. They're early, but they're closely followed by the strawberries on the coastal area, and they don't have enough advantage with the earliness to warrant growing them here.

PY: Oh, one of the things I wanted to ask you. I think it was Helen Clancey that was talking about it. You were talking about, you know, being stranded when it would flood. The wash disappeared, or appeared actually. How would you get supplies at that point?

PK: We just lived on what we had basically. During one of the storms in the early days another adventurous character and myself took a Model A Ford and left the ranch and shot straight north across the desert to the Highway 99 as it was called in those days. It would be I-10 now. But after the rain had hit the sand, it made

it solid enough for those big Model A wheels didn't sink in. And we shot across there and hit the grocery line in Indio. Generally, we lived off of our reserves. It was only a matter of a day or two, and I'd open the channel, to open the road up again with the tractors. Never more than a couple of days. So we could live off of what we had.

PY: When did the road actually go through? You said it was a sand road when you were in there.

PK: Oh, definitely. Well, Kay, was it, do you know? I don't think it had been paved when I returned from the service, had it? Was it still there?

KK: No, because I met Paul in forty-six when he returned from service. And the first time that I went over there, and this was prior to the time I had met Paul, it was this dirt road that he's referring to. And I remember there were tamarisk trees sort of to the east, and it was just a two-lane dirt road that went up to the ranch. But I don't recall, because we were away then during the time that he, we were married in 1950.

PK: We'd have to say it was in the fifties that they developed the road, and it didn't go through for a long time. It only went as far as Avenue 38 up there in the beginning.

Then it was finally cut through.

KK: But by 1950 that was all paved all the way through to what is Sinatra Drive now. But I don't know when they paved it. I just don't remember.

PY: But at one point they did develop it beyond Country Club?

KK: Oh, yes.

PK: Oh, yes.

PY: Where was the entrance to your ranch at that point?

PK: Well, it would have been right on the corner of what is now Bob Hope Drive and Country Club Drive. That was the headquarters, right on the corner.

PY: That's what this photograph is?

KK: Yes.

PK: Yes.

PY: So this would be . . .

KK: This building stood until just, oh, I would say, what, five years ago?

PK: Oh, on that order, yes.

KK: It was one of the last buildings that the Springs took down.

PK: They demolished it when the Springs was started.

KK: They had developed part of the area and left some of the original buildings standing. And this was probably one

of the last to go.

PK: You can still see the shelter my dad built on the east side of the road right across there, the little shelter for the mailboxes, still standing.

PY: Where is this? On the east side . . .

PK: Beyond Bob Hope Drive and just north of Country Club Drive. It's on the east side of the road. There's a corrugated iron shelter where the mailboxes stood. It would be just south of Eisenhower Hospital. My dad put that up. And it was the last of his handywork that is standing to my knowledge there.

PY: Can you describe your father a bit?

PK: He was an immigrant from Germany during World War I. His training was, he was a journeyman plumber. When he came to this country, he would put at a severe disadvantage because, number one, his inability to handle the language to start with. And the other thing is he was trained in the metric system. All the pipe dimensions were in the English system. So he found it hard to get employment, but he succeeded in . . .

KK: But he was nineteen years old.

PK: He was only nineteen years old, too. But he took employment and worked for a few years, and eventually

we were living in the south part of Los Angeles, and he had a little shop in the rear of our home. And he started to manufacture lighting fixtures. And in a couple of years he (coughing) developed the business to a point where he acquired a small factory site in the city of Huntington Park. And he developed it into a fine business. Shipped lighting fixtures all over the United States. And acquired a larger facility on Avalon Boulevard in Los Angeles in 1939. When the war started, the demand for metals, much of which was brass from lighting fixture parts, went into war material. And it was necessary to turn all his materials, even though they'd been partly fabricated, were taken into the war effort. My dad developed, then the shop went over to war production. He was producing air field lighting as a subcontractor until the time that, when I was in the service I remember getting a letter from my dad stating that he'd sold the business. And that was in 1945, late 1945, early 1946, that he made the final disposition of the business in Los Angeles. Of course, by that time the farm was pretty well developed and was a going entity of its own. He was very handy with tools, and also very knowledgeable about plumbing

and electrical work. And even the more sophisticated installations in the refrigeration machinery were all done by my father. He designed a lot of the packing equipment and did all his electrical and plumbing work, directed any other work that was done.

PY: What prompted him to go into farming?

PK: Beats me! (chuckle) He always liked the desert. He had an arthritic condition back in the thirties. And his sister and brother-in-law were employed in Palm Springs at that time. And he'd spent extended periods of time in the desert during those years. And he actually enjoyed the heat of the summer because it gave him relief from his arthritis. And subsequently he recovered completely from that affliction, and he seemed to feel that the desert climate was more conducive to good health. That would explain his reason for preferring the desert. As far as the farming aspects, it's a mystery to me.

PY: Had he ever done it before?

PK: No. I was always kind of interested in farming, but my dad had never had any farming background prior to that. He did a wonderful job of adapting to it from manufacturing business to becoming a successful farmer. Anything he

decided to do, he'd made it work right.

PY: (chuckle) How about your family, Kay? When did, you came in, your mother said something about you been about thirty, she'd been about thirty-six years in Rancho Mirage, something like that.

KK: You're going to start asking me questions, then you'll find out how old I am. (laughter)

PY: I think she already revealed it anyway.

PK: Yes.

KK: You're probably any secrets, but we came, my father as Paul had mentioned was in the building business. And they had lived in Los Angeles, and he had come out to the desert. And he loved the desert. I'm not so sure Mother was ever quite as interested in it as he was. And so Ike was two when I came to Palm Springs. So I grew up in Palm Springs and went through the Palm Springs school system. And the early days when it was just a small community. And then my parents moved out to Rancho Mirage in 1944, and that was the same year that I graduated from high school. And then I was away from school, so much of this period that Paul's referring to, I had very little knowledge about. I mean, I didn't meet Paul until forty-six. And, of course, much of this

development was going on, but I wasn't here. So then we came, we were married in December, 1950. And then again there was this period that we were away for awhile. And then when we returned in 1954, we came back to Indio because Paul was going into the produce business. So we've lived here ever since.

PY: So you actually did not spend much time in Rancho Mirage.

KK: Not in those early days, no. That was during the period that I was away, so I couldn't . . . Mother and you know, Daddy were there. And then I have a younger sister that was at home at the time. But most of that period, I was just sort of in and out, going away to school and so forth.

PY: When you were living in Palm Springs, was there any awareness of what was beyond Palm Springs, or was it just considered country?

KK: I would say during those years that I recall that it was sort of country. In other words, we knew Indio. We very seldom went to Indio. And it was just sort of desert in between. And, of course, even Cathedral City was a little bit remote. I know when I was in school, there were a couple of the students who lived in Cathedral City. And then, of course, there was a bus that took them

home, but it seemed like it was a long ride and a long ways to come to go to school. So there was a lot of desert in between those different areas and it was open. In other words, it was Palm Springs, then Cathedral City, and Rancho Mirage was just very limited. When we moved in forty-four out to Rancho Mirage, you could sit on the patio in the evening, and there'd just be a few lights off in the distance. And I still recall the motor pool they had there at the corner in Palm Desert where the military vehicles were parked. And it was really, and as I say, there was nothing really between that area and then Indio. The little grocery store out at Indian Wells.

PK: Used to laugh, I used to joke with Kay and say that when we get married I'll take you to Indian Wells for our honeymoon. There were four little wooden cottages there and a small grocery store. Used to be a standing joke about Indian Wells being out in the boondocks.

KK: I should have accepted it. Dave had bought property.
(laughter)

PY: No one knew then.

PK: Not really.

KK: But the area has grown so tremendously. It's just

unbelievable. Think back in the last, say, twenty-five years how this area has developed. We saw it, of course, starting with Palm Springs in the early days when it was pretty much of a movie colony. And the very wealthy people would come up from the east and spend the winters. And then in the summer it would get down to perhaps two hundred people in town, and that was it. But when the war came and the advent of refrigeration, it changed everything. Then it became more of a year round community. And I think that has contributed a great deal to the development of the whole desert area. But who would ever think that Palm Desert has grown so enormously. Practically sold from Palm Springs to Indio. Of course, we've seen, we came to Indio in fifty-four, and we have just seen an enormous development here. That county building.

PK: Shopping centers.

KK: Shopping centers. It's just unreal.

PY: Do you think the reputation that was made from farming, for instance, the Kersten Ranch, did anything to popularize the area?

PK: Oh, no, honestly I don't believe, it had a small effect, but it was perhaps more things such as the Thunderbird development and the golf courses. The golf seems to be

a big attraction to people. And also calling their attention to development here. I think it was more those factors than the farming. The farming was always of interest to tourists. They enjoyed seeing the orchards and vineyards, and it helped some in calling their attention to the area. It played a part, but I don't think it was a dominant part.

KK: I think the lifestyle that the desert affords has been one of the greatest attractions. Plus I think that due to the smog and the congestion in the city that people have come out and moved out this way. They've come down on a weekend or a vacation, they'd like it. I think that's why we have so many condominiums. They've become so popular with people from other areas that enjoy the climate and the lifestyle.

PY: I'm just curious, in Rancho Mirage did the highway make a division in terms of the sense of your community? In other words, around Clancey Lane and on that south side, was that like one community and then the other side where, you know, your family was living, Kay, like another community rather than there being a single community of Rancho Mirage or a single community of the cove area?

KK: Well, perhaps to a degree because that was more of a

farming community.

PK: Well, at that time, yes.

KK: And there were a group of people that had come out from

. . .

PK: Santa Monica.

KK: Santa Monica.

PK: Yes.

KK: That had developed there, and they were very . . .

PK: Around the Clancey Lane area.

KK: Right. And they were a very closely knit group. And then the others, like Paul's dad, that had come out that were involved in farming, where the people on the west side were more residents and just, you know, had no other investment other than their home. But again this was very sparse.

PK: But even in those early days some celebrities were found in Rancho Mirage. Just two doors away from Kay's mother's home Frank Morgan, the actor, had a nice home. So that went way back into the forties. Even then there was some recognition of the area.

KK: But I can remember one time my sister and I came from Los Angeles on the bus; the greyhound bus, of course, went through there. And it was getting kind of late, and the

fellow didn't want to let us off on the highway. And he took us up and around on Sahara Road, which I know is against their regulations. But he was afraid to let us off in the dark on the highway. And my other sister was there, and she saw this great big bus coming up, or first she didn't know what it was and saw these big red lights, you know, on the side. And then here was this greyhound bus that had actually taken my sister and me right to the door, and then right on around because he was afraid to let us off in that wilderness.

PK: Really.

KK: So it was very sparse. It really . . . forty-nine, fifty, there were very few houses out there.

PY: Did you use the community pool at all, or was that even in at that point?

PK: It was there. We took a few swims in the pool at Rancho Mirage.

KK: It was nice.

PK: On the corner of the velt and Sahara Road.

KK: Remember when they had constructed it someone that was, because it was kind of a nice addition you might think for the community, and someone had given me a piece of the blue tile that they were installing around the edge.

I have that someplace. But it was nice. It was a nice addition, and we used it for awhile, but, as I say, we were kind of in and out during that period.

PK: Yes. I don't think it was a heated pool. I don't recall, but I doubt it.

KK: I don't remember.

PY: Did you have irrigation water in your ranch that you used at all?

PK: What do you mean, for swimming or anything?

PY: Yes.

PK: No, we didn't have a reservoir. Our wells just run directly into the irrigation pipelines. There was a fellow named Jim Waldon who lived down on Clancey Lane and Rio Del Sol that had a reservoir that was used as a pool. And they were oldtimers. And I know we'd go down there and take a swim once in awhile. It wasn't a very fancy pool, but it was big enough to swim in. They used to laugh. They'd say, don't ever get a pool; all your friends will come and use your bathroom and your towels. Even then they recognized it was a liability to own a swimming pool. (chuckle)

PY: Did you all have times when you would get together?

PK: Oh, I'd say more social in those days than ever. We

. . . There weren't many functions to go to. You know, every once in awhile someone would have a birthday party or some sort of a reason to have some of the neighbors over for dinner. We'd reciprocate.

KK: What about the party your dad had when he opened the shed?

PK: Oh, when he opened the packing shed, that was a real party. We had all the neighbors and friends in on that. That was a big party. But it was an example of how things were then. I think people got together perhaps more then than they do now because of the lack of other functions in the area. So we were all well acquainted and, you know, very gregarious neighborhood, I would say.

PY: Were you at all friends with Dan Callahan?

PK: Yes. Dan was at school during the time, he was in the service, too. I think he'd gone to Davis. And he and I were introduced about the time I returned from the service. And we became good friends right from the beginning. Of course, the relationship between Hank and my dad being so close, why ultimately Dan and I became real close friends. We worked back and forth. We were, he worked on his uncle's ranch, Uncle Gogerty and Hank, and right on my dad's ranch. So we had a lot in common, and we've

been good friends all through that period until, you know, remaining so until the present time. And we've put out many a hot summer together on the tractors out on the farm. (chuckle)

PY: How do you feel about the growth of the area and the fact that it's going from farming to residential?

PK: Well, you know, in looking back I would never have anticipated this much development. We expected some, but not nearly to the extent that it has occurred. We, probably in our minds, that would have been continued as farm land at this time. When we first started, we didn't foresee the current development. It wasn't our purpose in acquiring the land to sell it for a higher and better use. As far as we were concerned, in the long haul, it would continue as a farm entity. So it's been rather a surprise. It's good to see people enjoying the desert. It's just one of those things that came along, some for the good and some of it's a little disappointing. But you might say I have a good feeling about it in general. It's getting to the point where people that like solitude have to go further somewhere, though. Anyone seeking a quiet life would certainly not find it here.

PY: I understand Greta Garbo used to stay out on Clancey Lane.

PK: Oh, I didn't know that.

KK: I didn't know that, but I'm not surprised. She liked to retreat, and at that time I imagine that was pretty far away.

PK: Yes.

PY: Well, you've answered, I think, most of my questions.

PK: Well, I've appreciated the opportunity.

KK: I found that little clipping I thought you might be interested in. I know you've seen those other ones.

PY: Who was writing this to

KK: Delano. Who was Delano, Paul?

PK: Who, Delmore? He was my dad's attorney in Los Angeles.

PY: Oh!

PK: Well, that isn't Delmore there, is it? Is that his writing?

KK: He wrote an article apparently.

PK: Oh. Well, the one that Delano wrote would be, yes, he's the attorney.

KK: To your father. And sort of describing that progress has been made out at the ranch during that period. I just happened to come across it.

PY: Who was helping you in the packing shed?

PK: You mean the personnel?

PY: Yes.

PK: Well, first in the, you mean the employees of the ranch, or in the shed itself?

PY: Just in the shed itself.

PK: Well, we had a lady named Mildred Bryant. Her husband was a grower/shipper down in Thermal. She was the floor lady for several years, you know, managed the crew in the packing of the grapes. And subsequently Martha Duncan, who was the daughter of Nell and Jim Wallen, who are old pioneers there, did work as floor lady. And there was a fellow named Ed Thomas, was the foreman of the ranch. He was in charge of the, directly under my father in managing the farming operation and also he played a part in the management of the shed during the packing season.

PY: I guess it was Olive Pederson from La Quinta who was telling me that a lot of the women worked in the packing shed in order to earn enough money to get away during the summer.

PK: To get out during the summer. That's right. Well, most of the employees of the packing shed were local women who were housewives, that some of them were wives of the

farm hands. Some were wives of other farmers in the area, you know, just people that did this work seasonally. And that's about right. You mentioned Mrs. Pederson, is she the lady that used to grow the gladiolas? Is Ray still living?

PY: Yes.

PK: They had a home in Newport Beach. I know we stopped there to say hello once or twice. It was Ray that taught me how to vaccinate the hogs. He had hogs also. That was a bad thing to learn how to do.

KK: How about when you bought the horse, remember?

PK: Well, that was a story. I grew some Kentucky winter beans one year, and they were grown on poles. And due to the poles being so close together in the rows, you couldn't cultivate with a tractor.

PY: Where was this? Was this here in Indio?

PK: It was up at the farm there. And I had about ten acres of those beans. And I bought a mule from a guy named Hastings that's down in Coachella area. And I got this mule and I cultivated those beans and brought them up to maturity. And then they promptly froze in November when I started harvesting. But this goes back to Ben Montoya. So I was telling Ben about the mule. I terminated my

interest in beans after that one bad year. The the mule was kind of unmanagable anyway. And so Ben said he'd buy the animal from me, so I, he said provided I'd deliver it to the Vaden Ranch in La Quinta where he was farming tomatoes. So I tied the mule to my old Chevy, and I proceeded down Highway 111 until I came to the bridge where it would be near what do they call that thing, that Balboa Bay Club. There's a bridge out of one of the tributaries to the wash there. And the mule balked and wouldn't go across the bridge. So I tethered the mule and took my car across. Then I walked the mule across the bridge and finally delivered her to Ben. So I saw Ben a few weeks later, and I said, well, how are things working out with the mule? He said, he sold her to a dog food factory. (chuckle)

PY: Onery?

PK: Yes, it was a hard mule to handle. But I got a few sore knuckles off those bean poles where the mule decided to go a little bit askance from the road. (chuckle)

PY: Had you grown other vegetables in here?

PK: Well, I grew a little squash, and then those Kentucky winter beans. And one year I planted watermelons, and they were blown out by the winds, so we kind of decided

to get away from that. I got down under this more soil in the lower valley to do my farming subsequently. It was better farm land down here for vegetables. The land up there was more of a sandy nature and lent itself well to dates and grapes, but not to vegetables. Are we still on that thing?

PY: Oh, yes. (laughter) Gee, I think you've just covered everything I can think of. So did you have to go to, if you wanted to pick up a carton of milk, you had to go to Indian Wells?

PK: We went, no, Indian Wells, the store there wasn't, didn't have enough to offer. We went to Indio to do all our marketing. And Hal was the stock chaser. I know we had to make our list very carefully. My father in his activities on the ranch invariably had a shopping list that included a trip to Imperial Hardware or Coler's Feed Store to secure parts. We tried to avoid making too many trips and tried to get it done in one or two trips a week. So it was necessary to be kind of careful in planning our trip and include all the items that we had need for that week. (chuckle)

PY: Was that because time was precious or . . .

PK: Well, it was a distance to travel and the time and the,

it was, on some occasions I made several trips a week. If we had a breakdown on equipment, I'd run down to one of the tractor repair shops or suppliers for various things to take care of our needs as they arose. As far as groceries were concerned, why we tried to do it in one felled sloop. And if we didn't have it on the list right, we just did without until the next trip. I even succeeded in raising turkeys one year. I purchased eight eggs up in Beaumont and put them under one of our chicken hens we had on the ranch, and three of the eggs hatched. And we thought we had two hens and one tom turkey. One of them strutted like a tom, so that's the way we had it figured. Several months and finally one of those turkeys that we thought was a hen decided it was a tom also and it started strutting. So they ended up in the freezer. About the time I went into the service, they were decapitated and put in the freezer. (chuckle)

PY: So much for raising turkeys.

PK: Yes. I conveniently never learned to milk a cow too well. I always let Ed Thomas do that. He seemed to have a good vent for livestock, and I very graciously let him take care of that chore.

PY: Sounds like at one time or another you had a little bit

of everything.

PK: Yes, we did a little of everything. It was quite an experience, really. It was new to me. I had prior to that very experience with livestock. But you learn in a hurry when necessity arises.

PY: I take it you all enjoyed it.

PK: Oh, yes. We had two riding horses, and it was very pleasurable to take the horses out and ride them. And it was an easy place to keep them. We had alfalfa, and they could graze in there. And they were, as far as I know, pretty happy up at the place. (chuckle) They were well cared for. Enjoyed them very much. Miss things like that. Living in the city as we do now, we don't have the opportunity to keep animals of that nature.

PY: Anything that we haven't covered that you can think of?

PK: No, I think that's about the whole shot, don't you, Honey?

KK: Well, I think so. That just about describes it pretty accurately.

PK: Yes. I would say so.

KK: There's always sort of a little sadness to see something like that disappear.

PK: Yes.

PY: Yes.

PK: Well, it's sort of nostalgic when you drive by there and see the little old mailbox cover. And that's about all that remains at the Springs on top of a lot of memories there.

PY: Well, at least you know you're not the only ones.

PK: That's for darn sure. It's interesting that the Peder-sons are still around. They sold that property, didn't they?

PY: Yes. They're living over in San Diego area.

PK: Oh, are they?

PY: Yes. At Fallbrook.

PK: I'd like to look them up. You don't happen to have their address. I'd appreciate it if you'd let me have that. I'll get in touch because I have the boat at San Diego, so maybe swing by and say hello to them.

PY: Yes, they're right off of I-15, as a matter of fact.

PK: Oh!

PY: Selling property for them.

PK: Well, it was five thousand an acre, which came to a million dollars even, for the two hundred acres.